THE CHALLENGE OF FACTS AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER

EDITED BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

PREFACE

Of the essays collected in this volume the following are, so far as I know, now printed for the first time: the title-essay, "A Parable," "Advancing Social and Political Organization in the United States," the "Memorial Day Address," the "Introductory Lecture to Courses in Political and Social Science," and "The Predicament of Sociological Study." The titles of the first and last of these are not the ones which stood on the manuscripts. The first was called "Socialism," but I have taken the liberty of renaming it in order to give both to it and to this volume a more distinctive title. The last was headed "Sociology" and required to be distinguished from the essay on Sociology in "War and Other Essays." The long essay on "Organization in the United States" is a find which should rejoice at least those former students of Sumner who pursued the study of American history with him. I should add to this list of new material the Memorial Addresses, which were included at request; that of Mr. Baldwin, however, has already been published among the records of the Yale class of 1885.

The presence of new Sumner essays in this volume, as in preceding ones, bears witness to the author's habit of withholding his writings from publication. Though I knew of this tendency I have been astonished at the amount, and also at the degree of elaboration, of the written manuscript found among his literary effects. Manuscripts were written and re-written, and then laid aside, apparently with no thought of publication. Meanwhile the eager mind of the author pressed on to other ranges, and

time had its way with the work of his hand. Often it is from yellowing sheets that we have been able to present what here appears in print for the first time.

Perhaps Sumner would have made changes in these unpublished essays before they were allowed to fill the printed page; he may have had some conviction, in his scrupulous self-criticism, as to their state of incompleteness. But I have no apology for publishing them. They can stand for themselves. Now that the emending hand is still, there is no longer any hope of alteration except of inessential detail, and so no valid reason for longer withholding such a rare and characteristic product.

In spite of the fact, then, that some of the essays in this volume have not received the author's final touches in preparation for publication, and that certain of them are preserved only in newspaper reports of lectures, which may or may not have been written up from manuscript, the editor has been very chary about making any changes except those which were obviously necessary. Even where some slight repetition appears in bringing together utterances that were not designed to be together, I have thought it best to leave things as they stand. Where the only report was clearly a garbled one, as in that of an address on "The True Aim of Life," given in 1880 before the Seniors of Yale College, I have, with great regret, discarded the production altogether. Many also of Professor Sumner's best addresses seem to have been almost extemporaneous; nothing remains of these except small packets of slips with items of a more or less cryptic nature set down upon them. In a few instances I am convinced that Sumner later changed his position as to certain points; but I could scarcely try to alter such things. From his later writings it is easy to see what he came to believe. In general I have

omitted much which would find a more appropriate place in a Life and Letters; and it is my conviction that such an enterprise should be sometime undertaken. If well done it could not but inure to the strengthening of hearts.

The dating of several of these essays is next to impossible. Sometimes the only clue to the time when they were written lies in the handwriting or the style. I judge, on these criteria, that the title-essay and "A Parable" belong to the eighties, and that the essay on "The Predicament of Sociological Study" is rather late — within a few years, one way or the other, of 1900.

The present intention of the publishers and editor is to bring out one more volume, which will include essays of a more technical character and will contain a full bibliography of Sumner's writings, in so far as such can now be assembled. This volume will probably be delayed for several years, in order to close the series definitively.

ALBERT GALLOWAY KELLER.

NEW HAVEN, September 17, 1914

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[1889]

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER was born at Paterson, New Jersey, October 30, 1840. He is the son of Thomas Sumner, who came to this country from England in 1836, and married here Sarah Graham, also of English birth. Thomas Sumner was a machinist, who worked at his trade until he was sixty years old, and never had any capital but what he saved out of a mechanic's wages. He was an entirely self-educated man, but always professed great obligations to mechanics' institutes and other associations of the kind, of whose opportunities he had made eager use in England. He was a man of the strictest integrity, a total abstainer, of domestic habits and indefatigable industry. He became enthusiastically interested in total abstinence when a young man in England, the method being that of persuasion and missionary effort. He used to describe his only attempt to make a speech in public, which was on this subject, when he completely failed. He had a great thirst for knowledge, and was thoroughly informed on modern English and American history and on the constitutional law of both countries. He made the education of his children his chief thought, and the only form of public affairs in which he took an active interest was that of schools. His contempt for demagogical arguments and for all the notions of the labor agitators, as well as for the entire gospel of gush, was that of a simple man with

[1] *The Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. XXXV, 1889.

sturdy common-sense, who had never been trained to entertain any kind of philosophical abstractions. His plan was, if things did not go to suit him, to examine the situation, see what could be done, take a new start, and try again. For instance, inasmuch as the custom in New Jersey was store pay, and he did not like store pay, he moved to New England, where he found that he could get cash. He had decisive influence on the convictions and tastes of the subject of this sketch.

Professor Sumner grew up at Hartford, Connecticut, and was educated in the public schools of that city. The High School was then under the charge of Mr. T. W. T. Curtis, and the classical department under Mr. S. M. Capron. These teachers were equally remarkable, although in different ways, for their excellent influence on the pupils under their care. There was an honesty and candor about both of them which were very healthful in example. They did very little "preaching," but their demeanor was in all respects such as to bear watching with the scrutiny of school-children and only gain by it. Mr. Curtis had great skill in the catechetical method, being able to lead a scholar by a series of questions over the track which must be followed to come to an understanding of the subject under discussion. Mr. Capron united dignity and geniality in a remarkable degree. The consequence was that he had the most admirable discipline, without the least feeling of the irksomeness of discipline on the part of his pupils. On the contrary, he possessed their tender and respectful affection. Mr. Capron was a man of remarkably few words, and he was a striking example of the power that may go forth from a man by what he is and does in the daily life of a schoolroom. Both these gentlemen employed in the schoolroom all the best methods of teaching

now so much gloried in, without apparently knowing that they had any peculiar method at all. Professor Sumner has often declared in public that, as a teacher, he is deeply indebted to the sound traditions which he derived from these two men.

He graduated from Yale College in 1863, and in the summer of that year went to Europe. He spent the winter of 1863–1864 in Geneva, studying French and Hebrew with private instructors. He was at Göttingen for the next two years, studying ancient languages, history, especially church history, and biblical science. In answer to some questions, Professor Sumner has replied as follows:

"My first interest in political economy came from Harriet Martineau's 'Illustrations of Political Economy.' I came upon these by chance, in the library of the Young Men's Institute at Hartford, when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I read them all through with the greatest avidity, some of them three or four times. There was very little literature at that time with which these books could connect. My teachers could not help me any, and there were no immediate relations between the topics of these books and any public interests of the time. We supposed then that free trade had sailed out upon the smooth sea, and was to go forward without further difficulty, so that what one learned of the fallacies of protection had only the same interest as what one learns about the fallacies of any old and abandoned error. In college we read and recited Wayland's 'Political Economy,' but I believe that my conceptions of capital, labor, money, and trade, were all formed by those books which I read in my boyhood. In college the interest was turned rather on the political than on the economic element. It seemed to me then, however, that the war, with the paper money and the high taxation, must certainly bring about immense social changes and social problems, especially making the rich richer and the poor poorer, and

leaving behind us the old ante-war period as one of primitive simplicity which could never return. I used to put this notion into college compositions, and laid the foundation in that way for the career which afterward opened to me.

"I enjoyed intensely the two years which I spent at Göttingen. I had the sense of gaining all the time exactly what I wanted. The professors whom I knew there seemed to me bent on seeking a clear and comprehensive conception of the matter under study (what we call 'the truth') without regard to any consequences whatever. I have heard men elsewhere talk about the nobility of that spirit; but the only *body* of men whom I have ever known who really lived by it, sacrificing wealth, political distinction, church preferment, popularity, or anything else for the truth of science, were the professors of biblical science in Germany. That was precisely the range of subjects which in this country was then treated with a reserve in favor of tradition which was prejudicial to everything which a scholar should value. So far as those men infected me with their spirit, they have perhaps added to my usefulness but not to my happiness. They also taught me rigorous and pitiless methods of investigation and deduction. Their analysis was their strong point. Their negative attitude toward the poetic element, their indifference to sentiment, even religious sentiment, was a fault, seeing that they studied the Bible as a religious book and not for philology and history only; but their method of study was nobly scientific, and was worthy to rank, both for its results and its discipline, with the best of the natural science methods. I sometimes wonder whether there is any one else in exactly the same position as I am, having studied biblical science with the Germans, and then later social science, to mark the striking contrast in method between the two. The later social science of Germany is the complete inversion in its method of that of German philology, classical criticism, and biblical science. Its subjection to political exigencies works upon it as disastrously as subjection to dogmatic creeds has worked upon biblical science in this country.

"I went over to Oxford in the spring of 1866. Having given up all my time in Germany to German books, I wanted to read English literature on the same subjects. I expected to find it rich and independent. I found that it consisted of second-hand adaptation of what I had just been studying. I was then quite thoroughly Teutonized, as all our young men are likely to be after a time of study in Germany. I had not undergone the toning-down process which is necessary to bring a young American back to common sense, and I underrated the real services of many Englishmen to the Bible as a religious book — exactly the supplement which I then needed to my German education. Ullmann's 'Wesen des Christenthums,' which I had read at Göttingen, had steadied my religious faith, and I devoted myself at Oxford to the old Anglican divines and to the standard books of the Anglican communion. The only one of these which gave me any pleasure or profit was Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity.' The first part of this book I studied with the greatest care, making an analysis of it and reviewing it repeatedly. It suited exactly those notions of constitutional order, adjustment of rights, constitutional authority, and historical continuity, in which I had been brought up, and it presented those doctrines of liberty under law applied both to church and state which commanded my enthusiastic acceptance. It also presented Anglicanism in exactly the aspect in which it was attractive to me. It re-awakened, however, all my love for political science, which was intensified by reading Buckle and also by another fact next to be mentioned.

"The most singular contrast between Göttingen and Oxford was this: at Göttingen everything one got came from the university, nothing from one's fellow-students. At Oxford it was not possible to get anything of great value from the university; but the education one could get from one's fellows was invaluable. There was a set of young fellows, or men reading for fellowships, there at that time, who were studying Hegel. I became intimate with several of them. Two or three of them have since died at an early age, disappointing hopes of useful careers. I never caught the Hegelian fever.

I had heard Lotze at Göttingen, and found his suggestions very convenient to hold on by, at least for the time. We used, however, in our conversations at Oxford, to talk about Buckle and the ideas which he had then set afloat, and the question which occupied us the most was whether there could be a science of society, and, if so, where it should begin and how it should be built. We had all been eager students of what was then called the 'philosophy of history,' and I had also felt great interest in the idea of God in history, with which my companions did not sympathize. We agreed, however, that social science must be an induction from history, that Buckle had started on the right track, and that the thing to do was to study history. The difficulty which arrested us was that we did not see how the mass of matter to be collected and arranged could ever be so mastered that the induction could actually be performed if the notion of an 'induction from history' should be construed strictly. Young as we were, we never took up this crude notion as a real program of work. I have often thought of it since, when I have seen the propositions of that sort which have been put forward within twenty years. I have lost sight of all my associates at Oxford who are still living. So far as I know, I am the only one of them who has become professionally occupied with social science."

Mr. Sumner returned to the United States in the autumn of 1866, having been elected to a tutorship in Yale College. Of this he says:

"The tutorship was a great advantage to me. I had expected to go to Egypt and Palestine in the next winter, but this gave me an opportunity to study further, and to acquaint myself with church affairs in the United States before a final decision as to a profession. I speedily found that there was no demand at all for 'biblical science'; that everybody was afraid of it, especially if it came with the German label on it. It was a case in which, if a man should work very hard and achieve remarkable results, the only consequence would be

that he would ruin himself. At this time I undertook the translation of the volume of Lange's 'Commentary on Second Kings.' While I was tutor I read Herbert Spencer's 'First Principles' — at least the first part of it — but it made no impression upon me. The second part, as it dealt with evolution, did not then interest me. I also read his 'Social Statics' at that period. As I did not believe in natural rights, or in his 'fundamental principle,' this book had no effect on me."

Mr. Sumner was ordained deacon at New Haven in December, 1867, and priest at New York, July, 1869. He became assistant to Dr. Washburn at Calvary Church, New York, in March, 1869. He was also editor of a Broad Church paper, which Dr. Washburn and some other clergymen started at this time. In September, 1870, he became rector of the Church of the Redeemer at Morristown, New Jersey.

"When I came to write sermons, I found to what a degree my interest lay in topics of social science and political economy. There was then no public interest in the currency and only a little in the tariff. I thought that these were matters of the most urgent importance, which threatened all the interests, moral, social, and economic, of the nation; and I was young enough to believe that they would all be settled in the next four or five years. It was not possible to preach about them, but I got so near to it that I was detected sometimes, as, for instance, when a New Jersey banker came to me, as I came down from the pulpit, and said, 'There was a great deal of political economy in that sermon.'

"It was at this period that I read, in an English magazine, the first of those essays of Herbert Spencer which were afterward collected into the volume 'The Study of Sociology.' These essays immediately gave me the lead which I wanted, to bring into shape the crude notions which had been floating in my head for five or six years, especially since the Oxford days. The conception of society, of social forces, and of the